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RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 002460

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV GG UP RS

SUBJECT: MFA SAYS RELATIONS WITH UKRAINE STRAINED, BUT NOT THREATENED

REF: A. KYIV 1624  
1B. MOSCOW 2351

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Alice G. Wells. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. While continuing to accuse Ukraine of supplying weapons to Georgia, and objecting to Kyiv's recent decrees on the Black Sea Fleet (BSF)(ref A), the MFA insisted to us that Russian relations with Ukraine were not threatened. Saying that Russia and Ukraine were interdependent in the economic and energy spheres, the MFA maintained that Russia would not impose economic measures to "punish" Kyiv. The GOR continued to contend that the BSF decrees passed the previous week were illegal (ref B), but reported that Ukrainian officials would travel to Moscow in the coming week to discuss the decrees. The MFA dismissed the Ukrainian government's questioning of its CIS status as irrelevant. End summary.

Relations with Ukraine Difficult, but not Lost

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12. (C) Russia's relations with Ukraine were not in a crisis, but were "developing," asserted 2nd CIS Director Viktor Sorokin August 18. Stressing that the two countries were interdependent in the economic and energy spheres, and had a wealth of other cultural and social ties, he said that while the relationship was going through a difficult period now, Russia believed relations would continue to be strong, and stressed that it was not in the GOR's interest for them to worsen. Emphasizing the importance of the energy interdependence, he insisted that Russia was not considering measures to "punish" Ukraine, claiming Moscow would not politicize its economic relations with Kyiv. He said that Russia had warned Ukraine over the last few months not to supply Georgia with weapons; not because Ukraine did not have the right to sell weapons to Georgia, but because there were too many and they were winding up in the conflict zone. Unfortunately," Sorokin said, Ukraine had not listened, and "this was the result."

Black Sea Fleet "Not a Threat"

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13. (C) Turning to the BSF, and Ukraine's decrees regulating BSF and other foreign military units' entry and exit into and from Ukraine, Sorokin reiterated previous MFA statements that the decrees were illegal and not in keeping with the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership, and the bilateral agreements on the BSF. He said the GOR had warned Ukraine that this issue could seriously affect bilateral relations. He stressed that the Fleet was "only engaged in a peacekeeping mission," and had been off the coast to protect

the Abkhaz. He noted that several ships had already returned to Sevastopol, but claimed he had no information on whether any ships remained off the coast of Abkhazia, or whether, if there were, they would pull out in harmony with President Medvedev's commitment to begin withdrawing troops. He stated that the BSF had "always guaranteed the stability of the region," and, saying that Turkey's fleet was three times its size, claimed that the BSF did not pose a threat.

¶ 14. (C) Underscoring that if the BSF were "hemmed in" by the restrictions contained in the two decrees, and needed "permission" to enter and exit its harbor, it could no longer function as a Naval fleet, Sorokin said Ukrainian officials would travel to Moscow the following week to discuss the two decrees. He reiterated that Moscow believed it was too early to negotiate the future of the BSF presence in Sevastopol, saying nobody could know what the situation would be like in 2016-2017. He stressed that if Ukraine were to become a member of NATO, the circumstances would "of course, be very different."

CIS Not at Risk

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¶ 15. (C) In response to Kyiv's recent comments following Georgia's withdrawal from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that Ukraine was not technically a member of the CIS because it had not signed the agreement, Sorokin concurred, but downplayed the impact of Ukraine's non-membership, saying Ukraine had been very active in the organization, but only in the economic and humanitarian

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areas, not in the political-military spheres.

Comment

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¶ 16. (C) Despite Sorokin's efforts to minimize the impact of recent events on the bilateral relationship between Russia and Ukraine, relations are on edge as the Ukrainian leadership rises to the defense of Georgia. Prior to the outbreak of hostilities with Georgia, we were consistently told that Ukraine, not Georgia, "mattered." Russia may underestimate the concern that its violation of Georgian territorial integrity has provoked throughout Ukraine, preferring to believe that Yushchenko's NATO aspirations remain decisively rejected by the Ukrainian public.

BEYRLE